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THE NUER AND THE GOVERNMENT

669 177 The Nuer have occasionally had trouble which has required definite Government interference to settle it.

Several years ago the Government put on a patrol to quell an uprising in the Garjak section of Nuerland. There the Nuer saw his first aeroplane. To him it meant a huge boat that could fly and from which unseen guns could be fired. Hence they call the aeroplane the 'boat of the sky'.

669 177 791 The Nuer had great faith in one of their prophets, but when he failed to save them at this crucial time their faith in him was shattered. Again, more recently, they have been led astray by faith in another of their number—Gwek Ngundeng—and again they have found that he, too, was but a human being such as they, and no more powerful than any one of them would be.

Ngundeng, father of Gwek, had made a huge mound in the Lau section of Nuerland, and the Nuer considered this mound sacred. Many things were buried in it. But the mound was blown up by the English in the early part of their second patrol in order to shatter the Nuer faith in their god. The Nuer asked themselves—could this mound, a sacred place, be blown up? Was it possible? Then when they realized that it not only could be blown up, but had actually been destroyed, doubt entered their minds as to whether the mound had really been sacred or not.

When Ngundeng, father of Gwek, died, they then ascribed his power to his son Gwek. They had great faith in him, but when they heard that he had been killed in this patrol faith dropped to the zero point: 'Could a god be killed?' they asked. But if their faith in him died they still felt that he had been a most wonderful person, even if he were not a god. Shortly before word came of his death there had been a number of showers during the

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dry season, and as this was unusual it had occasioned much comment among the Nuer. When they heard of his death a number of them at once assigned that fact as the cause of these rains.

In December 1927 there was a total eclipse of the moon which caused much alarm among the Nuer. They felt sure that it meant destruction to them and to their country, for was it not dripping blood? Later on, when the patrol was put on in part of Nuerland, they felt that it was just the fulfilment of what they had foreseen when the moon was in eclipse.

There is a saying among the Nuer that when they have plenty to eat they want to fight. That year, too, had seen a good harvest, and fight they did. There seemed to be many personal scores and old feuds that must be attended to that year, and then they declared it was all because the moon had predicted a year of trouble for them.

Not many Nuer have any conception of a country besides their own and the land occupied by a neighbouring tribe. They recognize their chief and his authority, but do not seem to realize their need of a larger, higher governing power.

Their acquaintance with this higher authority is limited. They see their cattle taken for taxes, they usually are willing to bring their difficulties to the District Commissioner to be settled; they are willing to be relieved of their physical ailments to some extent, and usually welcome the Government doctor and his trained assistants whom he sends out during the dry season.

The Nuer does not—or says he does not—see any good in paying taxes. Some of them feel that giving their cattle up for taxes is submitting without protest to a raid from a representative of another country, and they feel that if the Government can collect taxes (or raid their